



## RELEVENCE OF THE CHURCH TO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

The Bible is the book of Ideas. Thus the importance of the Bible is immense to its core as its foundational authority had been established in almost all the country, either directly or indirectly, for their democratic values. As such, the vast Bible dominion to environmental education increases more and more. As it's coverage area is massive, so does its relevance to establish itself for propagating and conserving its eco-theme for its readers through its conditioned catchment area, which would facilitate towards the positive education. The footprint of the Bible is big enough to establish and to plant the environmental value among the believers, and general masses, and to spread the eco-message to the whole world.

Therefore, the importance of implementing agency amplifies numerously. This huge footprint of the Bible can therefore be used by the Church for the entirety of Environmental Education.

**KEYWORDS:** The Church, The Bible, Christain, Environmental Education.

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to pursue critical reflection with regard to the links between Institution of the Church and Environmental Education. A recent Worldwatch Paper describes religion and spirituality as potentially powerful and natural allies for the sustainability community (Gardner, 2002). Environmental philosopher Max Oelschlaeger (1994) claims that “religion is a necessary condition for the resolution of ecocrisis,” and particularly acclaim the caring for creation as a “last, best chance” for environmental citizenship. Given the predominance of religious traditions and their enduring influence in the world, these recommendations signal a new hope for environmental sustainability. Religions can address environmental issues in ways that science cannot. This stirring also reflects a growing trend in the broader evangelical community to reexamine the biblical role of humans in relation to the rest of Creation and the purpose of God's redemptive work for all Creation (Cox, et. al 2003).

Thus, environmentally literate population can be expected to have the knowledge, attitude and skills to work towards improving environmental conditions. Therefore, there is a need for a new approach towards the environmental education. As such this study will try to establish a suitable platform for environmental education which is more holistic in nature while founded on socially changable intersubjective values that is fundamental instrument to create a new culture of global awareness. Thus, the role of the Church (in India) needs to be potentially defined and characterised to impart the conducive and acceptable environmental education with its own particulars embedded profoundly, and producing a contributing member of the society, who are rather steward, than dominator.

Therefore, the Church vision rather should be preparing peoples imperatively, and it is very crucial to expose youth to Environmental Education so that they acquire the essential values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to preserve and protect the environment (Bradley et al, 1999). Ultimately, it is the education system which will provide opportunities within the Church and the community for everyone to engage in actions that deepens the understanding of Christian's doctrinal position with regards to humanity's relationship to the environment. The Church (or any Religious Institution) is the lifeline of any society, therefore it must be a unique place, which should inspire a change in people's thought process and ultimately their attitude.

**Ecological Theology or Ecotheology:** is a form of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationships of religion and nature, particularly in the light of environmental concerns. Ecotheology generally starts from the premise that a relationship exists between human religious/spiritual worldviews and the degradation of the nature. It explores the interaction between ecological values, such as sustainability, and the human domination of nature. (<http://www.environment.gen.tr/religion-and-ecology/321-ecotheology.html>). “Ecological theology may be regarded as a next wave of contextual theology. . . in the quest for a theology which can respond to the challenges of our time” (Conradie, 2006). ‘Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to re-investigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis’ (ibid.).

### The Objectives of the Paper:

The sole objective of this study is to discover laudable ways of achieving overall Environmental Education development among general mass. This would mean achieving environmental attitude, right mind set and social responsibility through Environmental Education.

### Research Question:

The research problem at the heart of this inquiry is; Church can potentially play a positive role in promoting environmental education based on the Christocentric theology.

### METHODOLOGY

It is basically the descriptive research:

**Qualitative research approach:** The decision to choose a specific methodology should be based on its suitability to answer the research questions (Bryman, 1988). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) asserted that qualitative research emphasises the process of discovering how the research phenomenon, meaning is constructed and stresses the relationship between the investigator and the topic studied. Berg (2001) discriminated between qualitative and quantitative research arguing that qualitative research referred to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. Snape and Spencer (2006) indicated that qualitative research is a naturalistic/interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meaning people give to the phenomena within their study setting.

**Descriptive Research Method:** This study investigate phenomena in its natural setting by descriptive method. According to Kothari, descriptive design describes the present status of a phenomenon, determining the nature of the prevailing conditions, practices, attitudes and seeking accurate descriptions. The main characteristic of this method is that the researcher has no control over the variables; he can only report what has happened or what is happening (Kothari, 2007). To define the descriptive type of research, Creswell (1994) stated that the descriptive method of research is to gather information about the present existing condition. The emphasis is on describing rather than on judging or interpreting. The aim of descriptive research is to verify formulated *the theory* that refers to the present situation in order to elucidate it. The purpose of the descriptive design is to provide the perceptions and views of the respondents about the phenomenon studied (Burns & Grove, 1993).

**Documentary/ Literature Survey Research:** The use of documentary methods refers to the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon we wish to study (Bailey, 1994). Lindsay Prior (2003) has conducted extensive work on the use of documents in research and claims that “in most scientific work, of course, documents are placed at the margins of consideration”. According to her, “The modern world is made through writing and documentation” (Prior 2003).

**Methods of Documentary Data analysis:** Marshall and Rossman (1995) discussing this issue, state that “data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data.” “.... qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to

them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Gephart (1999) argues that interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation, hence there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), interpretivism is not a single paradigm; it is in fact a large family of diverse paradigms. The philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Boland 1985). This study is mainly based to hermeneutics, which can be treated as both an underlying philosophy, and a specific mode of analysis (Bleicher 1980). Thus, for Ricoeur, it is "the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts" (1991); in real terms that has frequently meant the texts of Scripture. This notion in terms of an ecological reading of the Scriptures is very important, along with the very practical substances of the Church's response to the crisis.

## DISCUSSION

Recognising that religion can be a key shaper of people's worldview (Tucker and Grimm 2001). The researcher believes that religion (particularly in India, which is a religious country) can promote positively towards the environmental awareness, education and practices, among its targeted and define groups, through its main and auxiliary functionality putting its Christo-centric objective forefront. Christian is the largest and constantly growing religions; and hence it is not incorrect to say that it has a major influence on the direction of global geopolitics and the future of humanity. And yet the amount of research on the role of Christian environmentalism, beyond the theological and philosophical boundaries of its doctrinal position, is very much limited; especially the action part in India.

**Some Excerpt from the Bible:** As part of the larger community, religion has historically provided ethical guidance and addressed social change. At the present time, it appears the larger community must be willing to listen again to what it has to say on the environmental issues. The filtration of Old and New Testament (The Bible) have numerous wisdom on stewardship. The parable of the talents (see Matthew 25:14-30) makes it absolutely clear that we who are entrusted with his property (Creation) will be accounted for our responsibility to improve the creation, by been "faithful and wise steward". True stewardship requires both respect for the trusteeship and covenanted imperatives and an active effort to progress the land for now and the future. This concept of stewardship dates from the beginning of time, when God entrusted the earth to Adam and Eve and their offspring (cf. Genesis 1:v26-28). This Scripture passage provides the essential foundation for understanding what Christian stewardship means. As such steward is someone who handles affairs for someone else. However, a steward did not own the kingdom. And, the master determines when and how long a steward would serve him, and we find many examples of stewards being placed over the affairs of their masters.

The crisis of domination builds on a hermeneutical misunderstanding of Genesis 1:v27, is directly based on the misinterpretation of Genesis 1:v28, in which "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion' ... over every living thing that moves upon the earth". While it may be consider that the term "dominion" in this passage have direct reference to "stewardship," the entire passage reveals that the stewardship has some essential characteristics. Therefore, all Christians are stewards of the earth and of the spiritual graces given through Christ's death and Resurrection. Man's dominion over inorganic and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute, it requires a religious respect. Stewardship respects the purpose for which things were made. When God commanded Adam and Eve to subdue all creation, He was not implying that creation and man were adversaries. It was expected that Adam and Eve would subdue the earth by using its resources for the advancement of humanity. Any approach that exploits nature, whether by intention or otherwise and whether promoted by Christians or others must be rejected.

In Genesis 9, God made a covenant with Noah and with all living things; that he would never again bring about such destruction to the earth, therefore people are a part of the Creation not the whole of it. The devastation of the flood was so great that nearly wiped out all life on the planet. The covenant was established between God and all living creatures; (cf. Genesis 6:v19; 7:v16; 8:v17; 9:v16) includes both man and the animals. These passages also teach us that the covenant establishes moral responsibilities of human beings to each other and to the whole created order. In the Covenant God gave a promise to Noah and blessed to "be fruitful and increase". It should also be noted, though, that this blessing is also extended to the animals in Genesis 8:v17 but does not directly repeat the mandate to subdue and rule over the animals. Thus, it also identified the covenant about the place of human life and their responsibility.

**Church's Role:** First, the church must instill in worshipers a vision of the whole world as God's beloved creation. The church must be passionately committed to right relationship with the whole of creation and the pursuit of a beautiful, healthy and sustaining environment for all people. It must incorporate an ecologically-informed understanding of our relationship to the natural world into its worshipes and statements. The Christian story of creation and redemption, the pattern of gratitude and guilt, repentance and renewal that runs through Scripture, is not a story of God and humanity alone, but of God, humanity, and nature.

A second key role of the Church is to be a connector. Local churches have a well-recognized role of linking individuals and families in the congregation through

worship, fellowship, and mutual care; and of connecting the congregation with the surrounding community through services, evangelism, and advocacy. Thus congregation can also help build healthy relationships between people and the natural environment with a joyful responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

As Christians, we ought to take note and consider how our faith affects our response to each issues and be grateful for the gift of creation and must therefore work towards ensuring to raise the moral issue of the urgency to the environmental crisis. As individuals, as institutions, as nations, and as a Christians Stewards, we should see the earth in a different perspective that shares the various concern, and be the most dependable citizens of the earth.

The widespread failure of the Church to seize the significance of the God's creation, in its approach for its mission can be altered. This suggests that there is a need to re-think biblical hermeneutics. Hence, when the hermeneutical perspective shifts from a human to an earth focus, new understandings is possible. Altogether the Church must instill in worshipers a vision of the whole world as God's beloved creation with an obligation, even a divine calling, and be engage in practical eco-mission.

Therefore, the change that is most needed is of sensitivity and intention. It may well be argued that a range of additional resources is needed, if eco-mission is to be as widespread and effective as it needs to be and helps in the development of Environmental Education. So, it is hope that while this study cannot itself create the needful change, it may at least be able to provide sound information to support the change, and encourage an effective approach to Christian ecological mission starting with the development of strong support for EE beginning with the Church itself. Wherein its hope that if all the aspects of environmental education in relation to Christian Theology were incorporated we can fully move towards the development of an absolute character, who possesses complete ecotheological attitude and the outlook.

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